

Writing Effective Leads

The writers will need a powerful hook to get any readers attention. The lead is the doorway through which a writer welcomes and orients readers to the idea. Do not begin an essay with the statement "This I Believe." Use at least two of the following strategies as more effective leads. Then choose the better opening with the help of a peer or. You must try AT LEAST TWO DIFFERENT STRATEGIES to see which one works the best for your essay. You may wait and write the leads last--after the rest of the essay is written. Sometimes it is better to do this.

- Question: "When was the last time you went without a meal?"
- Quotation: (from someone famous or from someone significant in your life)
"Be careful were the last words my father said to me each time I left the house."
- Strong statement (that your essay will either support or dispute)
"If you eat enough cabbage, you'll never get cancer."
- Metaphor: "The starlings in my back garden are the small boys in the playground, impressing each other with their new-found swear words. The crows all belong to the same biker gang. You need to know their secret sign to join their club."
- Description (of a person or setting): "Michael once mowed the lawns around Municipal Hall wearing a frilly apron, high heels, and nylons, with a pillow stuffed under his sweater so he looked pregnant. And it wasn't even Halloween."

Tips To Add Audience Appeal To Personal Essays

1. Be sure your essay is about something you care strongly enough about to elaborate and wax eloquent or passionate about it. Readers want to know what you know, feel what you feel, and understand exactly where you're coming from.

2. While the idea for the essay must be personal, make the frame big enough to allow your reader to find parallels between your experience and theirs. Give readers the opportunity to say, "Ah! Yes, I've never been there or done that, but I can relate to what the author is talking about."

Even if readers have not been on a mission trip to Kentucky, the effective writer must draw in an audience to show a more universal implication of a very personal experience or belief.

3. If you are writing about a small personal occurrence, put your idea in a context that gives the reader insight to both the small moment and the wider perspective. Think of your essay as a camera lens. You might start by describing a fine detail (a specific moment in the narrative), then opens up the lens to take in the wide view (the general/global backdrop), then close the piece by narrowing back to the fine detail.

4. Use details to draw the reader in. Be specific and avoid using abstract expressions and phrases such as “the best day of my life” or “I’d never known greater grief” to describe emotions of love or loss. Make the emotions real and immediate by noting specifics and details that draw the reader into your experience.

5. Employ all the senses to convey your ideas to the reader: sight, sound, taste, touch, and hearing.

6. Make sure that beyond all the idea development, your readers can summarize the MAIN IDEA that you BELIEVE. You should not have to hit the readers over the head with a summary statement such as “What I am trying to say...” or “What I really mean is...” In fact, such a closing is almost insulting or an indication that you fear you have danced around the belief without making it crystal clear. You must aim to leave the readers clear and satisfied—whether they agree with what you believe or not. Sometimes a brief echo of the opening is the most satisfying clincher to bring a personal essay full circle.